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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8712
INFO RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 0010
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 0011
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 0090
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 0032
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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 000236

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DEPT FOR DRL/MLGA LAURA JORDAN, EAP/MLS AARON COPE, AND
IO/RHS DEEPA GHOSH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/07/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [UNHRC](#) [UNGA](#) [UNSC](#) [BM](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: CZECHS HESITANT ON SPECIAL SESSION ON BURMA AT UN
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

REF: A) STATE 26833 B) STATE 27000

Classified By: Political Economic Counselor Michael Dodman for reasons
1.4 b+d

¶1. (C) Summary: While the Czech MFA has not reached a final decision, MFA staff are concerned about the timing and tactics of hosting a UNHRC special session on Burma. Czech unease relates to the possibility that a special session could undermine efforts to complete UNHRC institution building prior to the June deadline, and could support claims that Burma issues should be discussed only in the Human Rights Council and not in the UN Security Council. They offered other suggestions, including a resolution sponsored by the United States or adding the Burma debate to the fifth UNHRC session. The Foreign Minister himself (a stalwart supporter of human rights in Burma) will decide on whether or not the Czechs will propose the special session by the end of this week. Outside of the Burma issue, Czech goals for the upcoming session are institution building, Sudan and Israel. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On March 7, Political-Economic Counselor met with Veronika Stromsikova, Director of the Human Rights Department at the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to deliver reftel demarches and to discuss Burma and USG priorities for the upcoming Human Rights Council (HRC) fourth session.

BURMA

¶3. (C) Polecon Counselor outlined USG priorities for the upcoming HRC session and urged the Czechs to lead efforts for a Burma Special Session at the HRC. We stressed that the USG

had asked the Czechs to lead due to its long history on Burma issues and noted that this would be the last opportunity for the Czechs to take action on Burma prior to their departure from the Council. Stromsikova (who was familiar with the discussion that had taken place on this topic recently between Czech and U.S. officials in Washington) responded that Burma remained a high priority for the Czech government, but stated clearly that her department, and others within the MFA, had concerns about the USG proposal for the special session on Burma. Specifically:

¶A. The Czechs are concerned about the timing of the proposed special session, which they know will be controversial among UNHRC members. Their top priority for the fourth session is advancing institutional reforms (see further below), and fear that a protracted debate on the special session will hamper progress in this area. They believe that if there is to be a special session on Burma, it ought to take place after the fifth session.

¶B. Putting forward a country-specific special session at the upcoming regular session will only weaken the efforts of the Czechs and like-minded HRC members to battle the efforts of the OIC and others to constantly try to move country discussions out of regular sessions and into special sessions; the Czechs believe it is important to win this procedural argument and make sure that country matters are discussed in regular sessions.

¶C. A special session on Burma likewise undercuts Czech efforts to return discussion of Burma to the Security Council; scheduling a UNHRC special session at this time could make it look like the Czechs and other supporters agree with the position of Russia, China and South Africa that

Burma's problems don't rise to the level of the UNSC.

¶D. Least important but still noteworthy, Stromsikova noted that there is no consensus on this within the EU, and that even the UK and the Netherlands, traditional allies on Burma, have both voiced doubts about the idea, and that Germany has stated its opposition. Noting that the EU HRC members are already divided on the issue of Middle East resolutions, which are a priority for the Czechs (see below), Stromsikova said that the MFA would have to take into consideration how many battles it is prepared to fight within the EU.

¶4. (C) These procedural concerns notwithstanding, Stromsikova

reiterated that Burma remains a priority for the Czech Republic. Her Department, in coordination with other MFA sections, has put forward a decision memo for Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg -- a long-time advocate on Burma -- and she expected his decision by the end of the week. Looking ahead, Stromsikova asked that the USG consider two possible alternatives:

¶A. The U.S. tables a resolution calling for a special session (which it can do as an observer). If the U.S. did so the Czechs would support the resolution.

¶B. Concentrating efforts on the fifth regular session, or on a special session following the fifth regular session, so that institution building reforms can be completed.

CZECH PRIORITIES FOR UPCOMING HRC SESSION

¶5. (C) In regards to Czech priorities for the upcoming session, Stromsikova noted that as Chair of the HRC Working

Group on Mandates and Special Procedures, the GOCR's top priority is reaching agreement on institutional reforms prior to the June 18 anniversary/deadline. She expects that there will be an uphill battle to win approval for the special procedures that the Czechs believe important to make the UNHRC effective, thus the Czechs' reluctance to add too many controversial measures to this session. The second priority for the session is follow-up action on Sudan given the Sudanese government's recent behavior towards the assessment team. Third is Israel, with the Czechs strongly supporting the U.S. position that the Council is becoming a forum for Arab issues anytime something happens in the Middle East. But on Middle East issues generally, Stromsikova noted there is not a consensus within the EU and that many compromises will be required to achieve progress. In a similar vein, she stated Czech opposition to the OIC's push for the right of development and the defamation of religion.

¶6. (SBU) Stromsikova will attend the first half of the UNHRC fourth session and looks forward to working with U.S. observers in Geneva. She promised to let us know as soon as her minister makes a final decision on the Burma special session.

MUNTER